YUKON ADVISORY COUNCIL

ON

FIRST NATION CHILD WELFARE

ANNUAL REPORT

1998/99

YUKON ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
FIRST NATIONS CHILD WELFARE
BOX 5492
WHITEHORSE, YUKON
Y1A 5H4

102-03052/

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867-7500
393-3904

- Letter of Transmittal -

Honorable Dave Sloan
Minister of Health and social Services
Government of Yukon
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

Dear Honorable Mr. Sloan:

On behalf of the Yukon Advisory Council on First Nation Child Welfare, I am pleased to present you with our 1998/99 Annual Report.

This report covers highlights of council meetings and activities during the period between April 1, 1998 and March 31, 1999.

Sincerely,

George Morgan
Chair

/dml

Yukon Advisory Council on First Nation Child Welfare
ANNUAL REPORT 1998/99

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MEMBERSHIP

Pat Martin, Chair*

Agnes Johnson, Vice-Chair

Percy Henry, Elder

Dorothy John

Brenda Sam

George Morgan

Deana Lemke, Secretariat Officer

*Member's term of appointment expired during reporting period.

FORMATION AND MANDATE

The formation of the Council began in 1987 when the Minister of the day identified a need for greater involvement of First Nation people in child welfare services. The Council was approved during the summer of 1988 under regulations pursuant to the Children's Act, Section 177(1)d. The first meeting of the Advisory Council on First Nation Child Welfare took place in September 1988.

The Council's identified fundamental principle is for the well being of the child. Section 3 of the Regulations under the Mandate states:

(1) *The Advisory Council shall advise the Executive Council member on matters concerning the welfare of Indian children in the Yukon which the Executive Council Member refers to the Council for its advice.*

(2) *The Advisory Council may advise the Executive Council Member on those matters concerning the welfare of Indian children in the Yukon which the Advisory Council thinks it is appropriate to bring to the Executive Member's attention.*

(3) *The Advisory Council may:*

- (a) *consider submissions and suggestions from individuals and groups concerning the welfare of Indian children;*
- (b) *recommend and undertake research on matters concerning the welfare of Indian children;*
- (c) *recommend policies and legislation to enhance the welfare of Indian children;*
- (d) *recommend and participate in the development of services concerning the welfare of Indian children;*
- (e) *publish reports and information on matters concerning the welfare of Indian children.*

MEETINGS

The Council is required to hold meetings at least four times per year. During the 1998/99 fiscal year, the Council held four regular meetings in Whitehorse on the following dates:

May 14 and 15, 1998
October 1 and 2, 1998
December 12 and 13, 1998
February 15 - 17, 1999

The following guests attended one or more meetings:

Yukon Government:

Honorable Dave Sloan: Minister of Health and Social Services (H&SS)
Anne Sheffield: Director of Family and Children's Services, H&SS
Charles Pugh: Residential Services Coordinator, H&SS
Carol Cunningham: Youth Probations, H&SS
Irene Lubbers: Youth Achievement Centre, H&SS
Mary Peter: FAS, Family Support Worker, H&SS
Pat Somcox: Native Placement Worker, H&SS
Mickey Deuling-Kenyon: Director of Special Programs, Department of Education

Also in attendance:

Mickey Ferguson: Department of Health, Council of Yukon First Nations
Tim Brady: Youth Recreational Leadership Program
Irene Szabla: Child Develpoment Centre
Sally Tisiga: First Nations Family Reunification Committee
Barb Adel: AIDS Yukon Alliance
Jeddie Russell: Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon (FASSY)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MEETINGS

Children's Residential Resource Review

Council members reviewed the Children's Residential Resource (Group Home) Review. It was agreed that the First Nation group home concept is valuable, as has been recommended by Council in the past, and that it is imperative to have First Nation input at the decision-making level.

Family and Children's Services advised that all recommendations made by the consultants in the review are being responded to. Most recommendations not requiring financial resources have been or are being implemented. The percentage of First Nation workers is low, about 20% in comparison to First Nation clients who make up about 70%. A strong recommendation to implement a formal reporting procedure to each First Nation will be considered.

Anyone wishing to review the status of the implementation of the recommendations can visit Health and Social Services' web-site, which is updated regularly.
Web-site: http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/fcsframe.html

Young Offenders Act

The federal government is anticipating the tabling of new legislation in the fall replacing the Young Offenders Act. The desire is to distinguish in the law between very serious offenders and a possible further category of repeat offenders and to treat these quite differently from other offenders. With non-violent offenders, the intention is to provide diversion from the court system using alternatives to custody, thus trying to keep kids out of secure custody. This is an approach that has much support from across the country and the general thrust for this new legislation is a positive one from a child welfare perspective.

Youth Probation Centre Programming

Steve Sigmond, forensic psychologist contracted from Kelowna, will be doing a more intensive type of assessment for each young person coming into the youth probation service. By looking at what factors precipitate criminal activity of young people, it can be determined which type of intervention is needed. All of the clients will go

through the Youth Achievement Centre programming. The intent is to improve contact with each young person and to match services to their needs.

Youth Recreational Leadership Program

The Kwanlin Dun First Nation partnered with the Department of Health and Social Services to provide a program supporting young people, cultural programs and sport activities: the Child and Youth Recreational Leadership Program. Staff was hired to work over the summer of 1997 to deliver a 10-week recreation program. A very successful component of the program worked with teenagers through the summer Youth Employment Program. This program was very successful. Property crime decreased by up to 70% at Kwanlin Dun because kids were kept active and busy. Similar programs were run in Ross River and Watson Lake for 4 weeks with good results.

First Nations in School

The Department of Education provided an overview of what is being done with school children who need somewhere to turn for assistance. There is a three-stage process for dealing with these youths:

1) the parents and teachers work together;
2) a school based team working with the youth; and
3) referral to special programs.

The Department of Education is trying to address the fact that a significant percentage of First Nation children are not making it through High school. The Council discussed with the Department of Education official, the success of programs such as offered at First Nation urban high schools in Winnipeg and Edmonton and the Institute of Indigenous Government in Vancouver. These were used as examples of students excelling when their culture is incorporated into the curriculum.

The Elders in the School Programs are being implemented and the exchange between elders and students is having a positive impact.

AIDS Yukon Alliance

The AIDS Yukon Alliance Program (AYA) provides education and prevention for all Yukon residents. It also provides support services to HIV positive people, whose numbers are growing quite rapidly. Research has shown that the biggest problem is getting people to change their behavior. People know how to prevent HIV, but are not following through with prevention practices. AYA is trying to develop culturally appropriate education and behavior. AYA's new board would like to focus more on programming that includes new and innovative ways of education and awareness.

Child Care Services

The Child Care Services Program administers subsidy assistance for parents and monitors child care centres. Subsidy rates have remained unchanged since 1991, although there has been a 9.4% increase in the cost of living. Yukon College provides training for child-care workers through distance education courses as well as through Partners for Children, which is offering credit workshops in communities. There has been a good response to the programs offered.

FAS Family Support Worker Program

The FAS Family Support Worker Program was a three-year initiative, which was completed in October 1998. This program is being rolled into the "Healthy Families Initiative", which will be targeting children pre-birth to 5 years old. The goal of the program is to have healthy children and families throughout the Yukon. Currently the program services a 60% First Nation clientele. An evaluation has shown that the FAS Family Support Worker position has been an effective one. There are 5 Family Support Workers employed at Family and Children's Services. Some will stay with Child Protection and some will transfer to the Healthy Families program.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon

The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon (FASSY) received support from the federal government through project funding attached to programming or projects directed at 0-6 year old children. These funds will extend to March 2000 to work with community workers/members to set up six workshops to be presented in the communities. Each workshop will focus on the individual needs specific to the community. There is a basic FAS workshop presented by Yukon College and FASSY has recently established a Parent Support Group in Whitehorse.

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Circle of Courage Workshop

In cooperation with Kwanlin Dun First Nation and The Yukon Teachers Association, the Council sponsored a one-day workshop presented by Dr. Martin Brokenleg, held on Sunday March 28 at the Nakwata Ku Potlach House.

Dr. Martin Brokenleg, the workshop's presenter has conducted seminars throughout three different continents, holds a doctorate in psychology and has many years' experience in teaching and counseling. He is also co-author of the book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*. This book draws from early youth pioneers, Native tribal wisdom and youth development research while focusing on programs for belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.

The workshop was aimed at providing practical strategies for creating environments in which all youngsters can grow and flourish. It emphasized traditional Native American child rearing, which encompasses families, communities and nations.

The workshop was attended by 88 individuals from various child welfare related fields across the Yukon. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the Workshop Summary, please contact our secretariat.

Family Reunification Workshop

For many years "aboriginal children were the focus of large-scale assimilation attempts: religious indoctrination, forced enrollment in residential schools and seizure by social workers, who arranged the adoption of thousands of children by non-native families. Now many First Nations communities across Canada have begun a successful recovery process through a return to traditional healing methods and initiatives in education and social services." – Ernie Crey

To raise awareness on this subject and educate Yukoners about how to deal with these issues, the Council sponsored a Family Reunification conference. The conference was held in Whitehorse on April 27 and 28, 1998. Presentations were held by representatives from two organizations in Canada that are involved in this field: The United Native Nations (Vancouver) and the Manitoba Repatriation

Program. Their work primarily focuses on assisting adoption circle members with applying for Indian status, assisting them to know their rights and benefits, maintaining a registry of adoption circle members who are searching for people separated by adoption and foster care, including search, reunion and post-reunion services.

Another key workshop presenter was Ernie Crey, author of "Stolen from our Embrace" - a book about the abduction of First Nations children and the restoration of Aboriginal communities. He is the former president of the United Native Nations and has had a lengthy career in social work and as a high-profile political activist on behalf of aboriginal children and families.

The first day of the conference targeted a general audience of community members, social workers, and some professionals. The second day focused on how these organizations were established and on recommendations on how Yukon could support their efforts or even establish a similar program

GOALS FOR 1999/2000

Family Reunification

Our Council will endeavor to obtain statistical information on adoption care, foster care, and the number of people who have left the territory since 1960 and will express and foster awareness and ongoing support for family reunification issues in Yukon.

Education of First Nation Children

The Council will undertake initiatives to attend the high schools to meet informally with First Nation students and determine what has successfully kept them in school and what difficulties they have had to overcome.

Group Homes

The Council will continue to foster the creation of First Nation group homes through communication and follow up. Specifically, they will look more closely at First Nation group homes which have been in operation and why they did not continue.

Board Development

In order to serve as a productive and effective Advisory Council, our members commit to persuing opportunities for training and development.

Future Role of Council

The Minister of Health and Social Services requested the Council to consider and discuss the following as to their role in the future:

- what should the role of the Council be in relation to First Nations and self-government; should they take on a greater role with individual First Nations in advising them on child welfare issues?
- should the Council have some members who are formal representatives of individual First Nations or representative organizations?
- should the mandate be expanded to include Youth Justice issues?
- what skills and expertise should members have; ie. community health workers, youth probation workers, justice workers, etc?

If you have any suggestions or comments on these issues we would be pleased to hear from you.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT
April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999

REVENUE:		
1997/98 Surplus (Workshop funds)	$ 8,193.68	
Contribution Agreement	41,200.00	
TOTAL REVENUE		**$49,393.68**
EXPENSES:		
Travel	$ 2,688.84	
Meals and Incidentals	2,041.80	
Child Care	208.00	
Honoraria	14,100.00	
Administrative Support	10,740.00	
Accommodation	1,828.31	
Refreshments	755.06	
Phone	239.21	
Bank Charges	25.70	
Postage	56.65	
Advertising	374.86	
Office Supplies/Expenses	573.02	
Meeting Room Rental	128.40	
Other	100.00	
Family Reunification Workshop	9,526.56	
Workshop - Circle of Courage (Presenter)	3,807.75	
Workshop - Circle of Courage (Advertising)	398.62	
Workshops - Other	1,425.24	
TOTAL EXPENSES		**$ 49,018.02**
BALANCE – March 31, 1999		**$ 375.66**